DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 169 445 CG 013 391

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TITLE Strategies for Family Impact Analysis.
PUB DATE Oct 78
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council on Family Relations (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, October 19-22, 1978)
AVAILABLE FROM Minn. Family Study Center, 1014 Social Sciences Tower, Univ. of Minn., Minneapolis, MN 55455

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Science Research; Counselors; *Family Counseling; *Family Structure; *Policy Formation; *Program Design; *Research Methodology; *Social Attitudes

ABSTRACT

A framework for family impact analysis, developed at the Minnesota Family Study Center as part of the NIMH training program for family impact analysis, is presented. The four sections of the accompanying training manual are described as: (1) a set of questions which orient the reader to what family impact analysis is, its particular timeliness, the nature and extent of potential policy or programmatic impacts on families, and the different research strategies available for family impact assessment; (2) an aid for helping official policymakers, administrators and practitioners begin to understand and systematically assess the effects of policy or programs on family life; (3) actual case examples drawn from Minnesota Family Study Center trainees' internship experiences which illustrate the diversity of settings, the range of policy issues and potential impacts, and the variety of applicable methodological strategies; and (4) a selected bibliography on key works related to family impact analysis which provide further references. (Author)

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STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY IMPACT ANALYSIS

by

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Paper Presented for Family Impact Analysis Panel, National Council of Family Relations Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, October, 1978.

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STRATEGIES FOR FAMILY IMPACT ANALYSIS

* As McCobbin has indicated I'm going to be outlining a general framework for doing family impact analysis.

* The framework I'll be discussing today is described in a forthcoming pamphlet from the Minnesota Family Study Center entitled "Policy and the American Family: A Manual for Family Impact Analysis."

* This framework represents a meshing of three different kinds of impact analysis:
  1) Social Impact Assesment
  2) Evaluation research
  3) Family impact analysis - In particular this framework builds upon earlier work in FIA done by the Foundation for Child Development in New York; The Family Impact Seminar in D.C.; and the Family Study Center in Minnesota.

* The framework for FIA that I'm proposing is composed of six (6) basic steps. Before highlighting each of the six (6) steps, I'd like to make a few general points about FIA.

* FIA is not a static process but a dynamic iterative one.
  Let me illustrate this by the use of a slide. This slide illustrates the iterative process of family impact analysis.
  A. Process
     1. Start with existing policy or program
     2. Look for family impacts
     3. The status of the family suggests proposed policies.
     4. Which can be evaluated for their projected family impact.
     5. Future Family policies are based on these projected impacts.

B. There are two basic perspectives

1. Retrospective which looks at current family statuses, and looks back to see if these are related to existing policies/programs.
2. Prospective family impact analysis which examines family impacts as they occur or projects future impacts.

* Although FIA has become rather popular in the last few years, there are no new conceptual or methodological strategies in FIA. The framework I'll be discussing is based on six (6) steps that represent basis elements that should be included in any research study. The distinguishing factor between FIA and other kinds of impact analyses is that we are examining policy impacts of a family level.

* A final point to note is that, the steps, although laid out separately and sequentially, actually flow together and are mutually interdependent.

* Let me quickly list all six (6) steps and then spend the rest of my time elaborating on components under each step.

STEP 1 - IDENTIFY THE POLICY OR PROGRAM FOR ANALYSIS
STEP 2 - IDENTIFY THE FAMILY IMPACTS OF CONCERN
STEP 3 - DIAGRAM THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE POLICY COMPONENTS AND THE HYPOTHESIZED FAMILY IMPACTS
STEP 4 - DESIGN AND CARRY OUT THE RESEARCH
STEP 5 - ANALYZE THE FINDINGS
STEP 6 - EVALUATE THE FINDINGS AND PRESENT POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Turning to the slide to help focus on the different steps.....

STEP 1 - Is to describe the policy under study. In identifying the policy it is important to specify the different policy components.

*1. First it is important to indicate what kind of policy we are looking at. That is, what is the general policy area and within that area what specific policy is being examined? Today you will hear about specific policies in the area of social services, employment and law enforcement.

*2. A second characteristic is the policy sector - that is are we looking at public or private policies - and at what level: national, state or local jurisdiction. Today's panelist will be talking about both public and private policies at national and local levels.

*3. Current status refers to whether the policy currently exists or is being proposed.

*4. Implementation components refer to whether we are looking at legal, regulatory, fiscal or service delivery characteristics.

*5. The last consideration is the Target Population. It is important to identify the population to which the policy is explicitly geared as well as ask what other populations might be affected by the policy - or lack of policy.

STEP 2 - Is to identify family impacts of concern.

We can look at impacts on family structure and functioning. These family factors are obviously inter related. But we can talk about how policies might affect primarily structural factors such as family compositions or kin network patterns. Or how policies impact on family's ability to provide for the economic well being of its family members or to take of and nuture its family members.

STEP 3 - Having categorized both policy components and family factors, the third step is to diagram a basic relationship - including intervening factors which help link the policy to the family factors and external factors which might affect the basic relationship.

FOR EXAMPLE - We might be interested in the impact of long term care policies for the elderly on family functioning. To understand this relationship we need to specify what factors might link the policy inputs to family outcome - one such factor in this Example might be the amount of family involvement needed in care.

Similarly, it is important to consider external factors which might be affecting this relationship such as the availability of other needed social and health services for the elderly and their families.

STEP 4 - Having hypothesized a relationship between components and family factors, the fourth step is to select a research strategy.

Another key point to emphasize is that there are many different strategies for doing FIA. The selection of any particular strategy depends on:

1) Primary purpose of research
2) Research resources
3) Knowledge of methodological and statistical skills
4) Access to family level data

FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN REPORTING THE RESEARCH STRATEGY UTILIZED ARE:

1) Data collecting methods
2) Research design
3) Analysis techniques
4) Sampling
5) Source of data

If quantitative data aren't easily obtainable it is possible to project family impacts from non data based sources such as existing literature reviews, expert opinions or content analyses of existing laws or regulations.

STEP 5 - The fifth step is to assess and evaluate family impacts of each policy.

There are two basic analysis questions:

1) How many and what kinds of families are affected?
2) How do specific policy components affect family structure and functioning?

Policies may be assessed in terms of the;

A) Likelihood of impact
B) Type of impact
C) Strength of impact

The manual illustrates the use of checklists to categorize different family types and impacts.

STEP 6 - Is to evaluate the desirability of impacts. This involves designating a criteria of desirability and then comparing the relative advantages and disadvantages of each policy component.

In reality this is a difficult process because there is often a lack of consensus on what is a desireable, undesireable or neutral impact. Also, some policies have multiple, conflicting impacts for different types of families or different members within the same family.

This points to the importance in FIA of specifying the different impacts for different kinds of families and individual family members.

Given the analysis and evaluation of family impacts the final step is to present summary conclusions and recommendations.

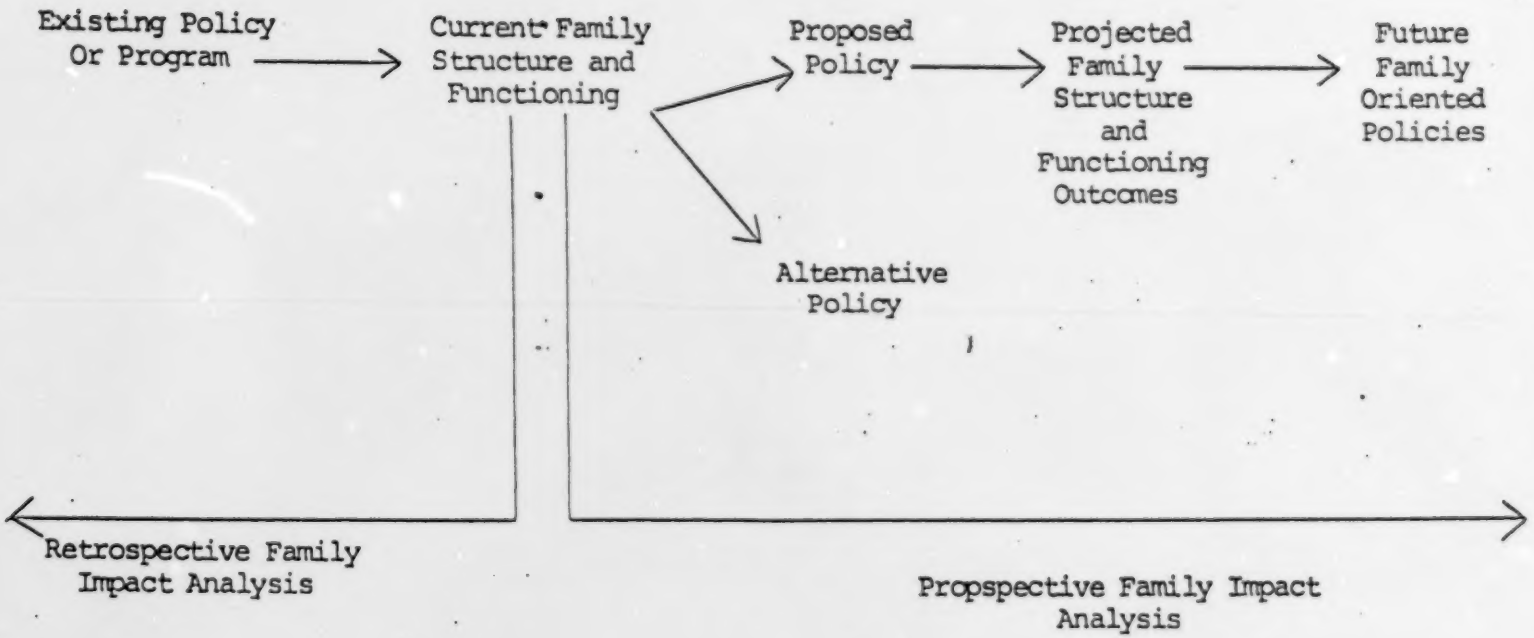
The kinds of policy recommendations the family impact analyst will make depend on:

1) The type of magnitude of policy impacts.

2) An assessment of the validity and the reliability of the findings.
3) The family impact analyst's own values and assumptions about desirable family outcomes.
4) A recognition of the constraints of the socio political environment in which the policy is operating.

In this brief time I've only been able to outline a framework for family impact analysis - The case studies to follow should help illustrate the different aspects of this framework.

ITERATIVE PROCESS OF FAMILY IMPACT ANALYSIS



PROCEDURE FOR FAMILY IMPACT ANALYSIS

I. DESCRIBE POLICY UNDER STUDY

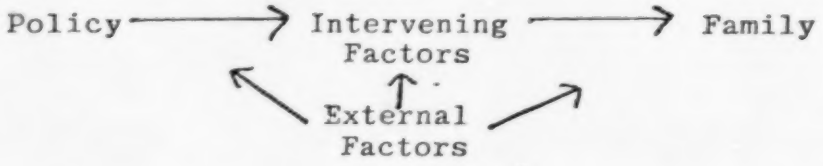
Policy Area

Sector/level:
Current status:
Implementation components:
Target population:

II. LIST FAMILY IMPACTS EXAMINED

Family structure:
Family functioning:

III. MODEL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POLICY COMPONENTS AND FAMILY FACTORS



IV. REPORT RESEARCH STRATEGY UTILIZED

Data collection:
Research design:
Analysis techniques:
Sampling:
Source of data:

V. ASSESS AND EVALUATE FAMILY IMPACTS OF EACH POLICY

Likelihood of impact:
Type of impact:
Strength of impact:
Desirability of impact:

VI. PRESENT SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Source: Ory, M. Policy and the American Family: A Manual for Family Impact Analysis. Family Impact Series. Minnesota Family Study Center, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN, 1978.